

United States. Qualification is based on a written examination that measures speed and accuracy at checking names and numbers and the ability to memorize mail distribution procedures. Applicants must pass a physical examination and drug test, as well, and may be asked to show that they can lift and handle mail sacks weighing 70 pounds. Applicants for mail carrier positions must have a driver's license, a good driving record, and receive a passing grade on a road test.

Jobseekers should contact the post office or mail processing center where they wish to work to determine when an exam will be given. Applicants' names are listed in order of their examination scores. Five points are added to the score of an honorably discharged veteran and 10 points to the score of a veteran who was wounded in combat or is disabled. When a vacancy occurs, the appointing officer chooses one of the top three applicants; the rest of the names remain on the list to be considered for future openings until their eligibility expires—usually 2 years after the examination date.

Relatively few people become postal clerks or mail carriers as their first job, because of keen competition and the customary waiting period of 1-2 years or more after passing the examination. It is not surprising, therefore, that most entrants transfer from other occupations.

New postal clerks are trained on the job by experienced workers. Many post offices offer classroom instruction on safety and defensive driving. Workers receive additional instruction, when new equipment or procedures are introduced. In these cases, workers usually are trained by another postal employee or a training specialist.

Window clerks and mail carriers should be courteous and tactful when dealing with the public, especially when answering questions or receiving complaints. A good memory and the ability to read rapidly and accurately are important. Good interpersonal skills are also vital, because mail distribution clerks work closely with other clerks, frequently under the tension and strain of meeting dispatch or transportation deadlines and quotas.

Postal clerks and mail carriers often begin on a part-time, flexible basis and become regular or full time, in order of seniority as vacancies occur. Full-time clerks may bid for preferred assignments, such as the day shift or a high level nonsupervisory position. Carriers can look forward to obtaining preferred routes, as their seniority increases or to getting high level jobs, such as carrier technician. Both clerks and carriers can advance to supervisory positions on a competitive basis.

Job Outlook

Those seeking jobs as postal clerks and mail carriers can expect to encounter keen competition, because the number of applicants will continue to exceed the number of openings. Employment of postal clerks and mail carriers is expected to increase more slowly than the average for all occupations through 2008. However, some jobs will become available because of the need to replace those who retire or stop working for other reasons.

Although efforts by the U.S. Postal Service to provide better service will increase the number of window clerks, the demand for window clerks will be offset by the use of electronic communications technologies and private delivery companies. Employment growth among distribution clerks will be slowed by the increasing use of automated materials handling equipment and optical character readers, bar code sorters, and other automated sorting equipment. However, despite greater use of productivity-increasing machinery, the expected increase in mail volume will require additional clerks.

Other conflicting factors are expected to influence demand for mail carriers. The competition from alternative delivery systems and new forms of electronic communication will not affect the volume of mail handled by the U.S. Postal Service. In fact, mail volume is expected to continue to increase, as population growth and partnerships with express delivery companies stimulate demand for mail delivery. However, increased use of the "delivery point sequencing" system, which allows machines to sort mail directly to the order of delivery, should decrease the amount of time carriers spend sorting their mail, allowing them more time to handle long routes. In addition, the Postal Service is

moving toward more centralized mail delivery, such as the increased use of cluster boxes, to cut down on the number of door-to-door deliveries. These trends are expected to increase carrier productivity and lead to slower-than-average growth for these workers.

Employment and schedules in the Postal Service fluctuate with the demand for its services. When mail volume is high, full-time clerks and carriers work overtime, part-time clerks and carriers work additional hours, and casual clerks and carriers may be hired. When mail volume is low, overtime is curtailed, part-timers work fewer hours, and casual workers are discharged.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of postal mail carriers were \$34,840 in 1998. The middle 50 percent earned between \$30,430 and \$37,950. The lowest 10 percent had earnings of less than \$26,040, while the top 10 percent earned over \$39,820. Median annual earnings of postal service clerks were \$35,100 in 1998. The middle 50 percent earned between \$32,140 and \$37,580. The lowest 10 percent had earnings of less than \$25,350, while the top 10 percent earned more than \$39,070.

Postal workers enjoy a variety of employer-provided benefits similar to those enjoyed by Federal Government workers. The American Postal Workers Union or the National Association of Letter Carriers, both of which are affiliated with the AFL-CIO, represent most of these workers.

Related Occupations

Other workers whose duties are related to those of postal clerks include mail handlers, who unload the sacks of incoming mail and separate letters, parcel post, magazines, and newspapers. In addition, file clerks, routing clerks, sorters, material moving equipment operators, clerk typists, cashiers, and data entry operators do similar work. Others with duties related to those of mail carriers include messengers, merchandise deliverers, and delivery-route truckdrivers.

Sources of Additional Information

Local post offices and State employment service offices can supply details about entrance examinations and specific employment opportunities for postal clerks and mail carriers.

Records Processing Occupations

Significant Points

- Most jobs require only a high school diploma.
- Numerous job opportunities should arise due to high turnover in this occupation.
- Little or no change is expected in overall employment, reflecting the spread of computers and other office automation as well as organizational restructuring.

Nature of the Work

Without the assistance of workers in records processing occupations, many organizations would be lost. These workers maintain, update, and process a variety of records, ranging from payrolls to information on the shipment of goods or bank statements. They ensure that other workers get paid on time, customers' questions are answered, and records are kept of all transactions. (Additional information about specific records processing occupations appears in separate statements that follow this introductory statement.)

Depending on their specific titles, these workers perform a wide variety of recordkeeping duties. *Billing clerks and billing machine operators*, for example, prepare bills and invoices. *Bookkeeping*,

accounting, and auditing clerks maintain financial data in computer and paper files. *Brokerage clerks* prepare and maintain the records generated when stocks, bonds, and other types of investments are traded. *File clerks* store and retrieve various kinds of office information for use by staff members. *Human resources clerks* maintain employee records. *Library assistants and bookmobile drivers* assist library patrons. *Order clerks* process incoming orders for goods and services. *Payroll and timekeeping clerks* compute wages for payroll records and review employee timecards. *Statement clerks* prepare monthly statements for bank customers. Other records processing clerks include *advertising clerks*—who receive orders for classified advertising for newspapers or magazines, prepare copy according to customer specifications, and verify conformance of published ads to specifications for billing purposes; and *correspondence clerks*—who reply to customers regarding damage claims, delinquent accounts, incorrect billings, complaints of unsatisfactory service, and requests for merchandise exchanges or returns.

The duties of records processing clerks vary with the size of the firm. In a small business, a bookkeeping clerk may handle all financial records and transactions, as well as payroll and personnel duties. A large firm, on the other hand, may employ specialized accounting, payroll, and human resources clerks. In general, however, clerical staffs in firms of all sizes increasingly perform a broader variety of tasks than in the past. This is especially true for clerical occupations involving accounting work. As the growing use of computers enables bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks to become more productive, these workers may assume billing, payroll, and timekeeping duties.

Another change in these occupations is the growing use of financial software to enter and manipulate data. Computer programs automatically perform calculations on data that were previously calculated manually. Computers also enable clerks to access data within files more quickly than the former method of reviewing stacks of paper. Nevertheless, most workers still keep backup paper records for research, auditing, and reference purposes.

Despite the growing use of automation, interaction with the public and coworkers remains a basic part of the job for many records processing clerks. Payroll clerks, for example, answer questions concerning employee benefits; bookmobile drivers help patients in nursing homes and hospitals select books; and order clerks call customers to verify special mailing instructions.

Working Conditions

With the exception of library assistants and bookmobile drivers, records processing clerks typically are employed in an office environment. Most work alongside other clerical workers, but some records processing clerks work in centralized units away from the front office.

Because the majority of records processing clerks use computers on a daily basis, these workers may experience eye and muscle strain, backaches, headaches, and repetitive motion injuries. Also, clerks who review detailed data may have to sit for extended periods of time. Although the work does not require heavy lifting, file clerks and library assistants spend a lot of time on their feet and frequently stoop, bend, and reach. Finally, bookmobile drivers must maneuver large vehicles in all kinds of traffic and weather conditions, and may also be responsible for the maintenance of the bookmobile.

Most records processing clerks work regular business hours. Library assistants may work evenings and weekends, but those employed in school libraries usually work only during the school year. Accounting clerks may work longer hours to meet deadlines at the end of the fiscal year, during tax time, or when monthly and yearly accounting audits are performed. Billing, bookkeeping, and accounting clerks in hotels, restaurants, and stores may work overtime during peak holiday and vacation seasons. Similarly, order clerks in retail establishments typically work overtime during these seasons. Brokerage clerks may also have to work overtime if there is a high volume of activity in the stock or bond markets.

Employment

Records processing clerks held over 3.7 million jobs in 1998. The following tabulation shows employment in individual clerical occupations:

Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks	2,078,000
Billing clerks and billing machine operators	449,000
Order clerks	362,000
File clerks	272,000
Payroll and timekeeping clerks	172,000
Library assistants and bookmobile drivers	127,000
Human resources clerks	142,000
Brokerage and statement clerks	92,000
Correspondence clerks	25,000
Advertising clerks	14,000

These workers are employed in virtually every industry. The largest number of records processing clerks work for firms providing health, business, and other types of services. Many also work in trade; finance, insurance, and real estate; manufacturing; and government.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Employers typically require applicants to have at least a high school diploma or its equivalent. Although many employers prefer to hire record clerks with a higher level of education, it is only required in a few records processing occupations. For example, brokerage firms usually seek college graduates for brokerage clerk jobs, and order clerks in high-technology firms often need to understand scientific and mechanical processes, which may require some college education. Regardless of the type of work, most employers prefer workers who are computer-literate. Knowledge of word processing and spreadsheet software is especially valuable, as are experience working in an office and good interpersonal skills.

Records processing clerks often learn the skills they need in high schools, business schools, and community colleges. Business education programs offered by these institutions typically include courses in typing, word processing, shorthand, business communications, records management, and office systems and procedures. Specialized order clerks in technical positions obtain their training from technical institutes and 2- and 4-year colleges.

Some entrants into records processing occupations are college graduates with degrees in business, finance, or liberal arts. Although a degree is rarely required, many graduates accept entry-level clerical positions to get into a particular company or to enter the finance or accounting field with the hope of being promoted to professional or managerial positions. Some companies, such as brokerage and accounting firms, have a set plan of advancement that tracks college graduates from entry-level clerical jobs into managerial positions. Workers with college degrees are likely to start at higher salaries and advance more easily than those without degrees.

Once hired, records processing clerks usually receive on-the-job training. Under the guidance of a supervisor or other senior worker, new employees learn company procedures. Some formal classroom training may also be necessary, such as training in specific computer software.

Records processing clerks must be careful, orderly, and detail-oriented in order to avoid making errors and recognize errors made by others. These workers should also be discreet and trustworthy, because they frequently come in contact with confidential material. Additionally, payroll clerks, billing clerks, and bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks should have a strong aptitude for numbers. Because statement clerks have access to confidential financial information, these workers must be bonded. Many bookmobile drivers are now required to have a commercial driver's license.

Records processing clerks usually advance by taking on more duties in the same occupation for higher pay or transferring to a closely related occupation. For example, some order clerks use their experience to move into sales positions. Most companies fill office and administrative support supervisory and managerial positions by

promoting individuals from within their organization, so information clerks who acquire additional skills, experience, and training improve their advancement opportunities. With appropriate experience and education, some clerks may become accountants; personnel specialists; securities, commodities, and financial services sales representatives; or librarians.

Job Outlook

Little or no change is expected in employment of records processing clerks through 2008. Despite continued growth in the volume of business transactions, rising productivity stemming from the spread of office automation, as well as organizational restructuring, will adversely affect demand for records processing clerks. Turnover in this very large occupation, however, places it among those occupations providing the most job openings. As a result, opportunities should be plentiful for full-time, part-time, and seasonal employment, as records processing clerks transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force.

Many record clerk jobs have already become heavily automated. Productivity has increased significantly, as workers use personal computers instead of more time-consuming equipment such as typewriters, adding machines, and calculators. The growing use of bar code readers, point-of-sale terminals, and optical scanners also reduces much of the data entry handled by records processing clerks. Additionally, managers and professionals now do much of their own clerical work, using computers to access, create, and store data directly in their computer systems. The growing use of local area networks is also facilitating electronic data interchange—the sending of data from computer to computer—abolishing the need for clerks to reenter the data. To further eliminate duplicate functions, many large companies are consolidating their clerical operations in a central office where accounting, billing, personnel, and payroll functions are performed for all offices—main and satellite—within the organization.

Despite the spread of automation and organizational restructuring, average or faster-than-average job growth is projected for some records processing clerks, including billing clerks, brokerage clerks, and library assistants and bookmobile drivers.

Earnings

Salaries of records processing clerks vary considerably. The region of the country, size of city, and type and size of establishment all influence salary levels. The level of industry or technical expertise required and the complexity and uniqueness of a clerk's responsibilities may also affect earnings. Median annual earnings of full-time records processing clerks in 1998 are shown in the following tabulation:

Brokerage clerks	\$27,920
Payroll and timekeeping clerks	24,560
Human resources clerks	24,360
Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks	23,190
Billing clerks	22,670
Correspondence clerks	22,270
Order clerks	21,550
Billing machine operators	20,560
Advertising clerks	20,550
Statement clerks	18,640
Library assistants and bookmobile drivers	16,980
File clerks	16,830

In the Federal Government, records processing clerks with a high school diploma or clerical experience typically started at \$18,400 a year in 1999. Beginning salaries were slightly higher in areas where the prevailing local pay level was higher. The average salary for all human resources clerks employed by the Federal Government was \$29,500 in 1999.

Related Occupations

Today, most records processing clerks enter data into a computer system and perform basic analysis of the data. Other clerical workers who enter and manipulate data include bank tellers, statistical

clerks, receiving clerks, medical record clerks, hotel and motel clerks, credit clerks, and reservation and transportation ticket agents.

Sources of Additional Information

State employment service offices can provide information about job openings for records processing occupations.

Billing Clerks and Billing Machine Operators

(O*NET 55344 and 56002)

Nature of the Work

Billing clerks keep records, calculate charges, and maintain files of payments made for goods or services. Billing machine operators run machines that generate bills, statements, and invoices.

Billing clerks review purchase orders, bills of lading, sales tickets, hospital records, or charge slips to calculate the total amount due from a customer. Calculating the charges for an individual's hospital stay may require a letter to an insurance company; a clerk computing trucking rates for machine parts may consult a rate book. In accounting, law, consulting, and similar firms, billing clerks calculate client fees based on the actual time required to perform the task. They keep track of the accumulated hours and dollar amounts to charge to each job, the type of job performed for a customer, and the percentage of work completed.

After billing clerks review all necessary information, they compute the charges using calculators or computers. They then prepare itemized



A billing clerk reviews a bill for accuracy before sending it to the customer.